Quaker Religious Thought

Barnesville Conference Papers

Quakerism and the Historical Interpretation of Religion
Chris Downing

Spiritual Religion and Historical Religion
Wilmer A. Cooper

The Relation of Quakerism to Its Own History
Lewis Benson

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Editorial

The past score of years has witnessed a remarkable development of interest in the meaning and significance of history as it is related to us today. For generations the western world, absorbed by its great discoveries and the power they had given it, had placed its greatest emphasis upon the individual and his present day, disregarding or paying little attention to the experiences of the past. But in recent years we have discovered our need for interpreting our own day and experiences, and out of this need we have once more been willing to turn to the past, questioning how it is to be understood and its wisdom made available. This is no merely theoretical topic, of interest only to scholars, but is of the utmost importance. The lostness of our day, cut off as it has been from our past, and the disasters which threaten us both nationally and individually are factors faced by every thinking person. We discover that the present cannot be understood in terms of the present alone, hence we turn toward the past with high expectation that it may have help to offer us. For the Society of Friends this interest raises the question of what our Quaker-Christian past holds of judgment, wisdom, and inspiration.

It was out of this concern with the meaning and value of history that the second Barnesville Conference of the *Quaker Theological Discussion Group* was held on July 1 to 4 at Barnesville, Ohio. Representatives of ten Yearly Meetings were in attendance, to hear papers and to participate in discussion on the general topic of "Quakerism in the Context of History." Three of these papers form the content of this issue of *Quaker Religious Thought;* the remaining two will appear in the Spring 1962 issue. In the publication of these articles we are for the first time departing from what has been the policy of this magazine. Previously each major article was accompanied by criticisms from the pens of several Friends. We feel that this temporary change of policy is justified by the fact that each of these

articles underwent the fire of criticism at the time of its reading and by the editor, and since each was rewritten in view of these comments it does contain in its present form the benefits of group thinking.

The serious reader will find in these papers much wisdom and much to ponder upon. Everyone knows that the past cannot be taken over wholesale and made into the present—for better or worse we *are* persons of the latter half of the twentieth century, not of the seventeenth and even less of the first. On the other hand, we have arisen from the past and our foundations are laid in it. How, then, are we to draw from it its deepest meanings and values and allow it to speak its message? These questions are of great interest to us all; to them the authors have directed their best thought.

J. C. K.

Quakerism and the Historical Interpretation of Religion

CHRIS DOWNING

> When all my hopes . . . in all men were gone, so that I had nothing outwardly to help me, nor could I tell what to do, then, oh, then, I heard a voice which said, "There is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition," and when I heard it, my heart did leap for joy.
>
> Then the Lord let me see why there was none upon the earth that could speak to my condition, namely, that I might give Him all the glory . . . Thus when God doth work, who shall hinder it? and this I knew experimentally.[1]

And this I knew experimentally—that there is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition. What Fox brings together here suggests to me that he, too, contended with the very issue that confronts us: the relation between the historical and the spiritual elements of faith. Faith for him is certainly not a simple matter of an objective knowledge of fact and yet it is clearly faith in the God who speaks to man, who reveals himself in history, in Jesus Christ; it is not faith in man's own capacity for an historically unmediated relation with God. The bifurcation in American Quakerism (at its worst) marks a tearing asunder of what is here so naturally brought together—the Christ of history and the Light within—a disruption leading to an external objectivity or a self-confident subjectivity. Each makes faith too easy and too weak to grapple seriously with life as it confronts us in our so-called post-modern world.

QUAKERISM AND ITS RELATION TO ITS OWN HISTORY

Nor can we simply return to Fox's answer, though we do need to return to an understanding of it. We cannot put it as he did; for, though (as Rudolf Bultmann points out) our relation to revelation is always the same, our way of talking and thinking about it does change. What we look at may be the

same, but the historical standpoint from which we look is inevitably a changing one.

Our problem, the question of the relation of history to the present moment, is not exclusively a Quaker one, for outside Quakerism there are attempts to wrestle with it which we as Quakers should take into account, as I shall try to do in this paper. It is not a problem imposed on Quakerism from the outside but one that we live with and face, within Quakerism and within ourselves. I could not write of it—conscious as I am of my lack of knowledge of Quaker history and of my inability to provide a finally satisfying answer (much less *the* Quaker answer), and, more importantly, of a more basic kind of failing to live where the answer is to be found—were it not that I know the *question,* have lived with it, have had to stand with different answers, have had to learn again and again that the relation is not a logical one, that (as Cardinal Newman said) it is not to be solved by a smart syllogism. I am grateful to Quakerism because, even when it rises above its potherb and its dishwater tendencies, it still recognizes that there are no shortcuts, that each must find his own way.

So I do not know whether I write more as a spokesman for Quakerism or as a witness to it of what I think it neglects or ignores (to its own peril or only to my dissatisfaction?) not only in its own history but in a larger historical context as well. For I believe in the relevance of this larger context, believe that what we as Quakers have to say now and what we had to say in the past is part of a dialogue with the witness of other elements in the Christian church and also, but somehow secondly, with those outside that church. If to be an American means to think of the Pilgrim Fathers as our fathers, then to be a Quaker would mean to think of Fox and Penington and Penn and Woolman and a host of others as our fathers; including, I would submit, Rufus Jones. For we cannot understand who we are unless we understand ourselves in relation to all of our past, unless we realize how much the way we put things today is colored by our reaction to Rufus Jones and to his generation. I think also that Richard Niebuhr is correct in suggesting that if we limit our appropriation to our Quaker forefathers we remain in a

sectarian frame of mind. I believe most of us would admit to having ancestors (and brothers) in the faith elsewhere as well, though we might not all find them in the same place.

An historical understanding of our own faith must mean that what Quakerism is called to be can be found only in relation to the past but not determined by it; that, in fact, the meaning of our past will itself be determined by our hope and vision for the future. Martin Heidegger's claim that the past is made by the future sounds strange and paradoxical. It is not wholly true; it seems to reflect some of the old liberal faith in man as his own maker, in history as the realm of freedom and not of necessity as well, but nevertheless it is suggestive. I wonder, is it reassuring to think that the ultimate meaning of early Quakerism depends partly on us?

SPIRITUAL AND HISTORICAL CONCEPTIONS OF RELIGION

The question of the relation of the historical and spiritual conceptions of religion might appear to be only a question of language, a legitimately individual choice of the symbols which seem most consonant with our experience, but we evade the issue if we discuss it at this level alone. The symbols are various—the Inner Light, Jesus Christ, the Self, the Cross, Now, the Word, the Eschatological Event—and they are not all simply equivalents for they imply very different understandings of our religion. The decision about language turns out to be a choice of an ultimate standpoint, a decision about the nature of the relationship between God and man and thus about the nature of man and of God. There is also a question whether God has really set all these symbols before us and said, pick the one that seems most appropriate to you.

The consummate mystical or spiritual experience is one of a loss of self, of a union with God; religious experience is felt to be private and ineffable. Although many words are used in trying to express the inexpressible, in the end all that seems to be possible for the mystic is to point or to exclaim or to resort to the *neti, neti* of negative theology. A rationalist metaphysic, by contrast, is not even in principle so silent: it seeks to describe God as he is in himself. Yet here, too, there is the presumption

of a kind of union with God—not through ecstasy but through thought coming to share his standpoint. In both cases, mystical as well as rationalistic, man attempts to abstract himself, to remove himself, from history.

The historical conception, on the other hand, recognizes that theology can only be done from the human standpoint, not from God's, for man is man and God is God. It insists that the only important knowledge of God for man is knowledge of his *relation to us,* his will in regard to us. We can know this will because God meets us in our own realm, in history. This is the conception we find in the Bible and it is one characteristic of biblical faith. History is not illusory because God does not create illusions. Man is not essentially a spirit or a rational mind only accidentally endowed with a time- and space-bound body; he is essentially *historical,* a unity of body and soul who becomes fully a person only in relationship with others. He finds himself "in a world with others"; this situation belongs to the God-man relation as the context of man's responsibility. Christianity, Newman says, tells us what God *is* by telling us what he *has done*—by the recital, as the current phrase has it, of God's mighty acts in history. This means not only the recital of the Gospel history but of what God has done and is doing for me, for I am involved in God's history, I am addressed by his word. Thus the confessions of an Augustine; thus also the journal of George Fox written that all might know the dealings of the Lord with him.

As we examine these various approaches, we are aware that the Quaker emphasis on a spiritual religion never meant mysticism in its extreme sense. The early Friends saw the relation to God in terms of communion, of obedience, not of mystical or metaphysical union; in terms of will, not of an almost bodiless spirit. Although Fox saw clearly that faith could not mean simply dogmatic adherence to a proposition about an event that had happened once in a long ago past, his own "break-through" experience implied precisely a new and living relation to the *historical* revelation, a realization that the one who spoke then speaks now, and that we know God only as we know ourselves

to be known by him. No more than for Luther was religion for Fox something that happened "in a corner." It did not mean only the self alone before God (though it did mean that), but also the gathering of a community. If revelation meets us in history it meets us in the realm of encounter and response, of man *with* man, the realm of our responsibility for each other. God wishes to bring us to him not only as individuals but in that togetherness with one another which was intended for us by the very order of our creation. This recognition that faith implies community is an intrinsic element of the historical conception of faith. The community has a covenantal relationship with God, it witnesses for him, serves as a paradigm for his kingdom, and (as Luther stressed) is needed by us all at times.

What we mean by speaking of the Quaker emphasis on spiritual religion is, rather than mysticism, faith as *trust in another*, as a *personal relation* involving the whole man, not only his mind or spirit. To hold together such a conception of faith and an historical conception of revelation is always difficult but when they fall apart it is more than tension that is lost. Faith then becomes not a relation to a person but a relation to the fact of something's once having happened, or else it becomes a personal relation with God for which the historical revelation in Christ is at most a paradigm. It becomes an intellectual conviction or a pietistic feeling, faith in spirit, in man's spirit, or faith in faith. Yet faith in history itself—the conviction that God's self-revelation can be identified with the progression of world-historical events—is just as immanentistic as faith in spirit, just as characteristic of nineteenth-century liberalism and just as impossible for us. I doubt that even the most optimistic of Quakers could today simply identify God's way through the world with the outward unfolding of history. Martin Buber's conviction that holy history is hidden history seems hardly questionable. The difficulty is that both history and spirit are ambiguous terms, that belief in either has proven illusory and that we do not know how to bring them back together again. By focussing on either alone, we lose the paradox—the difference between man and God and the mystery of the meeting between them.

These questions about history face us with special poignancy today because the questions concerning the end or goal of history, of meaninglessness in history, and of there being no discernible realm of meaning beyond history, meet us in our newspapers day by day. The options *seem* to be either a realm of meaning completely dissociated from history (or particularly from public history, as witness the "retreat to the home" of my generation) or chaos. It is not boredom or futility by which we feel threatened, but catastrophe. T. S. Eliot's lines:

> This is the way the world ends
> This is the way the world ends
> This is the way the world ends
> Not with a bang but a whimper

now seem ironically premature. Our situation now, the situation as felt from within as well as in its external aspect, has changed tremendously during the past decades—a different emphasis seems called for, an emphasis which I should think we as Quakers ought to feel called to make although I am not sure that we are really awake to the readiness in this hour for what we might say. Yet that the situation *is* different now, that a different emphasis is called for, is perceived by the very ones who helped to shape that earlier way of looking. Karl Barth who spoke then of the *deity* of God, of his infinite qualitative distance from man, speaks now of the *humanity* of God, the God who wills to be the God of man, the God who shows who and what he is in his *togetherness* with man, in the context of his history and dialogue with man. Karl Jaspers, who emphasized then the significance of the trans-rational elements in man's existence, speaks now of the necessity for siding with reason in the midst of the fog of the irrational. Then it was too easy a faith in man, in his rationality, that was deplored—now it is too ready a despair. Then the protest was against an automatic equating of history and progress, against extravagant estimates of man's freedom and self-sufficiency; now the plea is that nevertheless man should not despair and may not, cannot, retreat from history. If even Barth is not afraid to speak of universalism today, do not we with our testimony to a light that

enlighteneth every man have something to say, something that can be said without denying our historical Christian witness? When we reject that witness, those of us who do, is it more because of our concern for those who have never heard the Gospel, or because we cannot accept our own need of a savior?

It seems to be true that we are of the "post-Nein" generation, that since Barth's "No" at Barmen we cannot simply identify God and history. We all seem to share Karl Löwith's conclusion to his book, *Meaning in History,* that there is no immanent meaning to history. The question then is, how is a transcendent meaning related to history? The Christian response is that the transcendent meaning does not negate history but transfigures it; that history is overcome by—history! that God comes *into* history.

FAITH AND THE PERCEPTION OF HISTORICAL MEANING

At first glance, to identify God's revelation of himself with a particular historical event or series of events in the past would seem to deny that God is a *living* God who meets me here and now. But this, according to the modern philosophy of history as represented by a Dilthey, a Collingwood, or a Heidegger, is to misconstrue our relation to historical events. To ask a fundamentally *historical* question of revelation would be, precisely, to ask its meaning for *us,* its relevance to our present situation, to understand it as part of our own personal history, as qualifying our own present existence. An historical past is not simply a time that once was and will never be again; it is rather a moment whose *meaning* and *significance* continue to exist as a dimension of the *present.* The historical dimensions of past and future are inside us as well as out, as aspects of each historical moment. It is only as we recognize this, recognize how our present is qualified by the given-ness of the past and the potentialities of the future, that we really know ourselves as historical. This philosophical understanding of the living relation between history and ourselves is echoed by Buber:

> If history is a dialogue between God and man, we can understand its meaning only when we are the ones who are addressed and only to the degree that we render ourselves receptive. This is history's claim on me and so this is its meaning as far as I am concerned.[2]

The moment of revelation for Buber is not Sinai or the Cross, not a fixed dated point, but the moment when the individual *perceives* these as revelation; such perception is possible at any time.

Such an understanding differs from the objective knowledge of science in involving more than the rational faculty, in not being something that can be proven or simply passed on, in being like the relation between two persons rather than like the relation to a fact or thing. Newman called this kind of knowing the "illative sense"; Buber speaks of the "I-Thou attitude." Luther called it faith and said that faith was the correlate of revelation, that revelation is revelation only to the believer. Reinhold Niebuhr says that the truth about God and man cannot be known as fact but only in faith and repentance. Fox was speaking of the same relationship when he said that the Scriptures could be understood only by being in the same life and power as those were who brought them forth. That the historical relation is a personal relation means that in revelation God does not give us information about himself but that he himself comes to meet us.

The quest for the historical Jesus ended in failure not because it could not be proven that the man Jesus had lived but because there was no "objective" history about him available; the only relevant history was interpretation, *kerygma*. The idea that history *is* interpretation, that the conception of a purely objective history is a mixing of categories, is central to the existential understanding of history. The past is never closed, never finished; it is history only so long as it is a repeatable possibility which originated in the past. This implies that the future is the most important dimension since our interpretation of history will depend on our orientation toward the future. Yet to agree with Heidegger that the past is made by the future would be to ignore the Christian recognition that man (in Reinhold Niebuhr's phrase) is creature as well as creator of history; it would be to try again to escape from the paradox. Although the meaning of history for us depends on our perception and our standpoint, the objective factor cannot be dissolved. As Luther said, the Jews at least regarded Christ as a thief, we

look upon him as only a fable. Yet it seems right to say with Bultmann that Christ addresses us *now* as a question about our future, and to say with Buber that God is always the God about to come, that he comes only as the living God.

We cannot minimize the tension between the relativity of our perspective and the absoluteness of our commitment which characterizes the historical understanding of faith, since this would be to minimize the difference between man and God. We can know God only as he has shown himself to us and yet we know him to be a trustworthy God. "His Word," says Luther, "cannot be different from his nature."[3] Nevertheless our interpretive action should itself be understood in historical and not in purely personal, subjective terms. If revelation meets us in history, it meets us as we *are* in a world with others, in community. That the perspective of faith is the shared perspective of the community of faith was seen clearly by early Friends. We today know what it is to long for and seek after such a community and to despair sometimes of finding it in this centrifugal assemblage that Quakerism has become. We need to remember that it is part of the Christian *scandalon* that God speaks to man through *man,* that God can, if he will, speak through such imperfect instruments as Quakerism, such unprepared men as ourselves. We cannot decide that we are to be the chosen people nor that we are inadequate, but we can know ourselves responsible to him in this community where he has placed us, willing to leave the decision as to what is failure and what success in his hands.

REVELATION IN HISTORY

An historical conception of revelation cannot mean that God discloses himself equally clearly in all moments—there are mute times, times of eclipse as Buber feels ours to be, when (though we may still have faith that a word is being spoken to us) we have difficulty in hearing it, in discerning its meaning. Paul Tillich's conception of "theonomous" periods in history, of *kairoi,* times when eternity comes into time, may not have taken into sufficient account man's always ambiguous response, but even Reinhold Niebuhr admits that there are proximate

times, times when God and man draw closer. Revelation as historical cannot be revelation in general; it must always be particular and concrete, just as faith is not faith in general but faith at *this* time in *this* situation. Yet even Buber has come to see that a situational, individual ethic is not adequate to a realistic view of man as being still in history. He understands why Moses cannot accept Korah's plea that, since the people are holy, commands from without are no longer necessary; he perceives that "without law, without any clearcut and transmissible line of demarcation between that which is pleasing and displeasing to God, there can be no historical continuity of divine rule upon earth."[4]

To find meaning in history seems to mean finding an *interpretive center,* a point at which it is more clear than elsewhere what history is, what the meaning of man's existence is, what his relation to God is. For Christians it is Jesus Christ who meets us as such a midpoint of history. He comes to us as a new and necessary word, a word which clarifies God's relation to us as no other word does, but which we could never have deduced, would never have expected to come this way. An historical understanding of man and God is one which speaks of both in terms of act, not being; in terms of encounter and response. Thus a consistently historical conception of Christ is not one that speaks of a metaphysical unity of divine and human essences but of an identity of will between God and Christ, of our conviction that in hearing this man it is God's voice we hear. It means that the relation between God and man in Christ is not a static fact or image but itself an action, an event. The relation between God and man is that of dialogue. Christ has been called a dialogic event; in him God's word and man's response are *one* word. God is present in all his creation but in this event he shows us most clearly that which is most important for us to know—that he cares for us, comes to meet us, wills to be a father to us. That God reveals himself in history in itself tells us what he is like in regard to us; it shows that he is God, who, although he comes in a way that we could not have anticipated, does indeed will to come to meet us, and suffers for us, and forgives us.

And as Luther emphasizes, he comes to us in a way that lets us remain men. To wish for a vision of God outside history, with no reference to an historical past and an historical future, is to wish to be something other than a real man; it is to wish to be gods ourselves. "That there may be room for faith, all that is believed must be hidden, yet it is not hidden more deeply than under a contrary appearance."[5] That the death on the Cross is the triumphant center of history is true only for the believer; for him holy history is *not* hidden history. There is no attempt to hide the circularity; what is called for is more like a resolution than like a conclusion. This interpretive act implies a decision about ourselves as well as about Jesus Christ; revelation is not understood until we know that it includes us, that it is not only addressed to us but is *about* us, about our relation to God. That God came to man in Jesus Christ means that he is a God who comes to man, who comes to us. That God is such a God is never a fact of the past, never something we already know: it is always still a question of faith.

Nor is everything clear even when we believe, believe through our returning doubt that it could be so. For even the most historically-minded of us it is difficult to believe that history is really so important, that the singular event is truly unique, that God actually meets us fully as a person. And an essential mystery remains—a mystery which is perhaps deepest at the very point where God reveals himself most clearly—that God should be a God who reveals himself—to *us*—in history. To understand, says Buber, is not to be able to explain but to be ready for personal encounter.

There is still the question of the meaning of history in another sense, the sense of its end rather than its center. The question is whether the tension is that of a Here and a Beyond, or of an Already and a Not-Yet. In a way it must be both, so long as we remember with Jaspers that "there is no way around history, but only a way through history."[6]

If God really meets us in history, then he does not "fix it from the yonder side," for the relation between God and man is more like two parts of a conversation than like cause and ef-

fect. This means that history is not predetermined, that it is genuinely open, that God has left something for man to do, that we are *responsible*. It is a paradoxical fact that for us who do not believe in predestination it becomes most difficult to act, at least after we have come to see the ambiguity in ourselves and all the situations which confront us. There is no doubt that the way of history is the way of risk. Here our Quaker understanding of man as one who can respond to God's call has relevance: our faith can give us courage to live and act in history.

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Spiritual Religion and Historical Religion

WILMER A. COOPER

A fundamental fact about the life of man is that he is paradoxically a citizen of two worlds—the world of spirit, which is the realm of freedom and universality, and the world of physical reality, which is the realm of necessity, structure, and particularity. History combines these two worlds in a time sequence which is irreversible and non-repeatable. From the vantage-point of the Hebrew-Christian faith, the space-time world of history is not an illusion but has objective and concrete reality. Unlike Eastern religions, Christianity and its predecessor, Judaism, place great emphasis upon the events of history as media for God's revelation of his will and purpose to man. Both Christianity and Judaism affirm rather than deny the value of life in this world. For this reason, the emphasis upon life in the here-and-now carries with it ethical concern and social responsibility, both of which are largely lacking in Eastern thought. At the same time, the events of history are believed to be of primary significance in relating the inward subjective realm of spirit to the outward objective world of physical reality. It is with this *relationship* between inner and outer, between spirit and objective world, that this paper deals.

BASIC ASSUMPTIONS AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

It is an underlying assumption of this paper that Quakerism is rooted in and inextricably bound up with Christian history. A century ago it would not have been necessary to assert this, but we are required to do so in the light of the growing tendency among some Friends to disclaim their Christian heritage and realign their religious loyalties.

The dilemma which Christians have always had to confront is that of understanding and relating the inward realm of the spirit to the outward dimension of history. Heresies have arisen when one of these has been emphasized at the expense of the other. Friends especially have been obsessed with this problem. It has been at the root of many of the Society's internal controversies over the years and continues to be a problem which needs clarification. The British Friend, Edward Grubb, expressed one aspect of it in his Swarthmore Lecture of 1914:

> If the Society of Friends is to do its work in bearing witness to the world of the truth of God . . . (and) if it is to help the struggling souls, within and without its borders, into the sure anchorage of Christian faith, it must, in particular, seek for clearer light than it has yet attained on the connection between the direct experience of God in the soul and the revelation brought in history by Jesus of Nazareth; it must unite, more effectively than in the past, the Jesus of history with the living "Christ" of experience.[1]

The two chief philosophical categories which need to be considered here are, first, the relationship of *time* and *eternity* (i. e., man's time versus God's time), and secondly, the relationship of *body* and *spirit*. In the Hebrew-Christian tradition time is believed to have objective reality in history. It is not a construction of the mind and thus illusory in terms of human experience and meaning. In contrast to this the main stream of Greek thought held that mind superimposes itself upon nature and that time is the subjective or mental dividing up of the natural process in order to deal with it in meaningful and manageable form. For the Greeks, history was man's observation of the recurring processes of nature, symbolized by the cycle of the seasons. The Hebrew-Christian view, on the other hand, sees history as the objective realm of decisive action in a unique non-repeatable and irreversible order of events in which every event helps to shape subsequent history. This view may be symbolized by the straight line which implies direction, purpose, and fulfillment. A third kind of time is sometimes delineated, which may be symbolized by a point. Here eternity breaks into time in the moment, referred to by Thomas Kelly as "The Eternal Now."

The relationship of body and spirit may also be described in terms of a tendency in the late Greek view to regard the material, corporeal world as evil and the world of spirit as good, whereas the Hebrew-Christian view always regarded the physical world as fundamentally good in its creation, while the spirit is that which breathes life into the body. Contemporary science has also helped us see that no sharp delineation can be made between body and spirit. Matter is energy in motion; moreover, the physicists tell us that the principle of indeterminacy operates here in a manner corresponding to the principle of freedom operative in the sphere of mind and spirit. We do not conceive any longer of natural law in deterministic ways but as laws descriptive of the orderly manner in which nature operates.

In attempting to relate these ideas to the paradoxical way in which body and spirit interpenetrate each other, Amos Wilder has made the following observations which are significant from the point of view of Christian biblical faith:

> Religion in the Bible roots in man's primordial impulses and social bonds, and that is why it is powerful . . . Our tendency for some reason is to put the spiritual side of man on one side and the instinctive side of man on the other . . . . (In such a separation) we miss the full meaning of the incarnation . . . . Revelation and the grace of God are tied up inseparably with our "somatic" existence . . . with our fleshy—sensuous—body life with all its organic relationships, widening out as these do into the social, economic, and political spheres.[2]

There are two fundamental Christian doctrines which from a theological perspective attempt to relate these two diverse and yet interdependent and indivisible realms of life. The first is the *doctrine of Incarnation,* according to which God was incarnate in the Jesus of history, and secondly, the *doctrine of the sacraments,* which declares that the physical symbol is an outward sign for an inward grace. Friends go even farther and look upon all of life, the entire visible world, as an incarnation of God's creative spirit and an outward manifestation of his spiritual reality. These two doctrines mean that neither realm can be separated from the other; they represent the two sides of the same metaphysical and religious coin. Here we find expressed a deep

and profound insight into the nature of life and existence. It was in the person of Jesus Christ that this was most completely expressed, namely, in the joining together of the God-man, who united the humanity of Jesus with the divinity of Christ.

FRIENDS "HISTORICALLY UNGRATEFUL"

Having set forth the underlying assumptions of this paper and having stated the philosophical nature of the problem, we now turn to an exposition of the problem as it relates to Quaker history and thought.

There are two types of religious expression among Friends today which, it seems to me, represent aberrations from the historic Quaker norm. One of these may be termed "pietistic spiritualism" (frequently taking the form of religious fundamentalism) and the other is "religious mysticism" (frequently taking the form of a vague religious liberalism). Both, in my judgment, are false representations of historic Quakerism with its emphasis upon man's personal encounter with the living Christ within and its accompanying Christian doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Both of these approaches to Quakerism cultivate and nourish a religious experience of good feeling and escapism which either consciously denies the outward historical dimension of life or unconsciously creates a false dualism between the outer and the inner aspects of the religious life. The early Quaker norm may be characterized by what I would call an authentic "religious existentialism."* This type of religious experience is grounded in a personal encounter with "Christ who

*The term "religious existentialism" as used in this paper means that religious truth is to be known within the context of history, that it is revealed to particular persons in particular times and places. The term also means that the reality of man's personal relationship to God and the fellowship of the church cannot be known apart from participation and involvement. In other words, one cannot know God in a state of objective detachment. The Quaker emphasis upon a "religion of experience," or an "experimental knowledge" of God, conveys much the same meaning, though this view usually presupposes "unmediated" or "direct" religious knowledge without reference to history as a medium of revelation.

has come to teach his people himself," to use George Fox's term. This encounter was apprehended by individuals in the concrete situations of life. Richard Ullmann says that Friends " . . . have known long before the existentialists that revelation 'does not come as an abstract and universal truth out of history' but 'is always special, for it always comes to particular men in particular situations in history.' "[3]

Baron Von Hügel once charged the Friends with being "historically ungrateful." This strikes me as a valid criticism of Friends and one which we need to take seriously. There are two points in particular where we need to heed this charge, namely, at the point of the relationship of the historic Christ to the inward Christ, and secondly, at the point of the relationship of biblical revelation to the immediate guidance of the Spirit. In both cases we are dealing with a historical manifestation of religious truth and experience. H. G. Wood has written that "the great fabric of religious truth is being woven in history . . ." and that the "inward light enables us to appreciate history, not to ignore it."[4] This is indeed wise counsel for Friends who have tended to overspiritualize their faith.

Quakerism must always emphasize the inwardness of religion and the personal appropriation of it, which is what is intended when we speak of Quakerism as a religion of first-hand experience. On the other hand, the special plea which I wish to make is that we not lose sight of or de-emphasize the historical and outward dimension of this inward experience. Both "pietistic spiritualism" and "religious mysticism" run this danger. As Friends, we need to recover (or perhaps discover for the first time) a genuine sense of biblical religion which recognizes the importance and significance of historical events as means of God's revelation to man. It is through these events in specific times and places that the living Word of God is spoken and mediated to man. It is doubtful whether there is any such thing as a "pure unmediated experience" of God. Even the one who experiences such mystical incursions is himself rooted in a particular historical context so that his religious "apperceptive mass" is conditioned thereby. This is why I suggest that we re-

evaluate our use of such terms as "religious experience" and "mystical experience" in favor of a Quaker religious existentialism which apprehends "moments of truth" through encounter with the concrete events of life. I am increasingly drawn to Peter Berger's paraphrasing of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, that "Christianity is not a religion: it is concerned with Jesus Christ" because Jesus Christ represents the supreme revelation of God to man in a concrete historical event. "Religious experience" as such may be vague, subjective, and the victim of pathological misinterpretation. In order to determine whether it is an authentic experience of revelation from God, one has to find some way of testing its validity by objective norms which, in so far as possible, avoid subjective distortions.

CORRECTIVE OF BIBLICAL RELIGION

As was already intimated, a chief point at which Friends have had special difficulty in relating the spiritual and historical dimensions of religion to each other has been in reconciling the Christ of experience with the Jesus of history. There has always been a certain indecision about this problem, coupled with a tendency to emphasize one side or the other at the expense of an integrated point of view. Richard Ullmann says:

> We can observe, throughout Quaker history, a tidal movement between the Inner and the Historic Christ, sometimes emphasizing one, sometimes the other; but we also observe that for the great Quaker saints the identification of the two was not really difficult, though perhaps expressed less clearly in thought than in practice.[5]

Howard Brinton in a slightly different vein confirms the unitary relationship of the two when he writes:

> Since the Light Within is God revealing Himself to man, Jesus of Nazareth was God revealing Himself in history. Without the historical revelation the inner revelation would be incomplete. Each revelation requires the other for its fulfillment. The timeless requires the temporal and the temporal requires the timeless.[6]

In spite of this encouraging word from Richard Ullmann and Howard Brinton, the fact still remains that in terms of both

faith and practice Friends have been unable to develop an integral view of the spiritual and historical. If this is to be accomplished we need to reflect with serious intensity upon those factors which may help to bring about a proper relationship between the two. The remainder of this paper suggests two possible approaches.

In the first place it is my judgment that the most basic thing for us to do is to rediscover the importance and relevance of biblical religion.* Biblical religion is rooted in history and committed to the proposition that God and his spirit, his will, his judgment, and his love are to be known through the common and ordinary experiences of our personal and corporate history. In rediscovering this indispensable sourcebook of our faith—the Bible—we must be perennially vigilant not to mistake it for the Source itself but to recognize it for the medium which it is intended to be. There is a biblical literalism and legalism present among some Friends which is neither true to our Quaker heritage nor true to what I believe to be God's truth and the dynamic way in which he communicates it to us. But at the other extreme from Friends who use the Bible as a religious prop, there are the biblical illiterates who glory in the idea that they have been liberated from the religious forms and claims of the past. They have become obsessed with the philosophical and religious pragmatism of our day which looks upon the "free man" as one who has learned how to cut himself loose from the shibboleths of the past. Although the Friend of this persuasion may not accept such a judgment, it is the Hebrew-Christian view that the liberated, free man is not the one who declares his independence of his past religious and social heritage but the one who discovers the pure stream of that heritage, often overlaid as it may be by the encrustations of man's misdeeds and mistakes. The free man, from the Hebrew-Christian point of view, is the one who finds his true identity (his true self) in becoming

*The writer is aware of the perennial debate whether there is any such thing as an underlying unity to the Bible. The assumption here is that such a unity is clearly discernible in spite of the plurality of religious expression set forth in the Bible.

reconciled to his Creator, who fashioned him in his own image. The man who declares his independence of this Source of life is by definition a sinner—one who has wilfully cut himself off from God. If one is dedicated to a religious life which owns rather than disowns God as revealed in Jesus Christ, the Lord and Redeemer of all life and history (which historically is the heritage of Friends), then I know of no better place to begin that life than with a serious study of the nature and meaning of biblical religion and its relevance to our needs today. It is *contemporary* in almost every sense of the word. It is *existential* in that it speaks to us here and now in the life situation in which we move and have our being. It is *dynamic* in that it has no place for static religion but is continually open to new revelations of God's truth. If Friends can recover something of this it can, I believe, become the source of their renewal.

CORRECTIVE OF QUAKER THEOLOGICAL ENCOUNTER

A second thing which Friends can do to help bring about an integral relationship between the spiritual and the historical is that the various groups of Friends which stress one or the other of these should experience a real encounter with the other's point of view. In the past hundred and fifty years American Quakerism has been characterized by three major theological motifs. There has been the Quietistic tradition which placed a high premium on the inwardness of religion and thus upon the Christ within. For many decades this view was espoused by the followers of Elias Hicks, though in its purest form it has been best represented in this century by the Conservative Friends. At the opposite extreme has been the strong emphasis of Joseph John Gurney and the Evangelical Friends upon the historic work of Christ and the Bible as the source of authority. This view has had its chief influence among the programed-pastoral meetings of America, which today constitute between sixty and seventy percent of American Friends. The Evangelical contingent of this body of Friends has held steadfastly to this biblical and theological emphasis and has carried some aspects of it to an unfortunate extreme. The third point of view may

be generally termed the Liberal approach. These Friends have emphasized a middle ground between the Quietistic and Evangelical poles of Quaker thought, undergirded by liberal theological presuppositions. They have looked upon the Inward Light more as a rational or "Logos" principle in man than a personal encounter with the living Christ within, or the inward baptism of the Holy Spirit. In biblical teaching they have given great weight to Jesus as teacher and example, which has resulted in their putting a major emphasis upon ethics.

The significant fact is that all of these Friends need each other because each holds an important aspect of Christian truth. Contemporary Quakerism should continue to emphasize spiritual inwardness as a vital manifestation of the dynamic working of the Holy Spirit. But there must be added to this the very important element of the historical dimension of biblical religion, free from literalism, legalism, and false pietism. There is also the important emphasis of the Liberal view as well, namely, upon preserving an open mind which is not afraid of new interpretations of truth and the place of reason in religion, providing the use of reason is not allowed to become an end in itself by supplanting faith and revelation. Coupled with the Liberal recognition of the rightful place of reason is its concern with ethics as an important aspect of religious witness. But the concern for ethics must avoid religious moralism and the notion that man can by his own efforts alone extricate himself from his moral and social dilemmas. In these various emphases which respective groups of Friends make, it is incumbent upon the whole Society to recognize how much we have to learn from the particular heritage which each has sought to nurture, in the assumption that it was upholding "true" Quakerism. If we can rediscover and experience a real religious and theological encounter with each other, it will go a long way toward bridging the chasm between the inward and outward dimensions of our Christian faith. This encounter, however, must be something more than a tolerant appreciation of our diversities. Its purpose must be a common and decisive search for religious truth, based on the conviction that God has made it possible through special

revelation of himself to know and experience this truth. From such an encounter there is bound to arise a new strength and power of life such as Friends have not experienced since their beginning.

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The Relation of Quakerism to Its Own History

LEWIS BENSON

I wish to maintain that there is a view of history that belongs to Christianity and to Quakerism and that this view has largely disappeared from Quaker life. Before attempting to outline the view of history that belongs to Quakerism I will first briefly describe some varieties of both the non-historical and historical approaches to contemporary Quakerism.

SOME CURRENT TRENDS

Among those who see contemporary Quakerism as essentially *unrelated* to its history I will mention two types. One of these arrives at its position by identifying the essence of Quakerism with a mysticism that is akin to Eastern mysticisms. When understood in these terms Quakerism is seen as a timeless spiritual religion not tied to any historical events. From this viewpoint the essence of Quakerism is independent of its history. In this world of space-time, all religions must have an historical side but this is not the essential thing.

Another type of non-historical approach is found among those Quakers who are not mystics or exponents of spiritual religion but who believe that we ought to "enter afresh in each generation on the adventure of naked living." For these Friends Quakerism is, by definition, identical with the Quaker ideas and practices that prevail at the present moment and therefore we learn nothing about what Quakerism should be by studying what it has been. The past is dead and the present is living. The exploration of the past is a legitimate field of scientific study but the Quaker historian of Quakerism is not making any significant contribution to the ongoing life of the Society of Friends.

There is also to be found a variety of approaches among those who do see Quakerism as related to its own history—of the

most important of these Frederick Tolles has recently given us an excellent survey. Without attempting such a comprehensive survey I want to review some current trends in which Friends try to link the Quakerism of today with that of the past.

The first is mostly the work of British scholars and it grows out of a situation that is peculiar to British Quakerism. British Quakerism in the twentieth century has tended to identify itself with organized Free Church Protestant Christianity. In the pioneer work of organizing Free Church Councils on the local and national level Quakers played a significant part. Today they take their places in these councils as a matter of course and in several places a Quaker serves as president of the local council. The effect of this close association over several generations gives to the English Quaker mind a sense of belonging to the free church tradition in a way that is rarely found among non-British Friends. This trend has been greatly strengthened in recent years by the work of Geoffrey Nuttall. He interprets early Quakerism as a development within Puritanism and regards it as the extreme left wing of those groups who chose to pursue the Puritan ideal as separate denominations. Although Geoffrey Nuttall is himself a believer in the right of each denomination to maintain its separate existence, his work as a historian of early Quakerism has had the effect of strengthening the position of those Friends who are ecumenically minded. Maurice Creasey speaks for such Friends when he says that "the Reformation had somewhat the function of a prism; it broke up the white radiance of the rediscovered Christ of the New Testament into rainbow colors, and each of the Reformation churches —the Society of Friends not excepted—tended to concentrate its attention upon the color of its choice. Is it not possible, to continue the metaphor, to see the Ecumenical Movement of the present time as having somewhat the function of a lens, gathering together, harmonizing and focusing once again those isolated refractions . . . ?"[1]

Harold Loukes, another British Friend, has laid hold of this general view of Quakerism and has attempted to extract from it all its logical implications. It is his view that the Quakers must now accept the fact that as a community they are circum-

scribed. He believes that Quakerism has already reached its maximum development in history and is merely a gloss or commentary on a text that would not exist were it not for the faithfulness of non-Friends. We are thus portrayed as a parasitical body whose very existence is dependent on the continued existence of religious bodies very different from our own. He states that our point of departure is no mighty proclamation of truth and maintains that we have been stressing the small truths while other Christians have been stressing the great ones.[2]

"Quakerism," he says, "is like an instrument in an orchestra picking up the theme from other instruments, and playing it with a certain individuality appropriate to itself; but without the grand statement of the theme in full orchestra it would lose much of its beauty."[3] Just how important, in his view, the Quaker instrument *is* in this orchestra is indicated when, using a different figure, he says, "It is small change we deal in," but he adds that we must be ready with our "twopence"—"our little store of faith and assurance."[4]

It is no wonder that many of the more serious and responsible Quaker youth in Great Britain have ceased to look to the Society as furnishing the base from which large stores of faith and assurance can be built up. With the clear-eyed logic of youth they show a strong disposition to by-pass fragmentary Christianity—i.e., Quakerism—and reach toward the Christianity that they have been told has the white radiance of the whole gospel. They are strongly attracted to ecumenical Christianity and not a few of its more thoughtful members have indicated their openness to purging Quakerism of certain features that stand in the way of fullest Quaker cooperation in the ecumenical movement.

If Quakerism is one of the smallest of the many fragments within Protestantism and if it has reached its maximum potential then it has no place to go but down. In 1954 Harold Loukes told a conference of European Friends that when the negative views of the Quakers "have been heard and heeded by the Christian church then the diverging stream of Quakerism must flow back into the main current."[5] And so we are represented as

being small because we come from a dwarf breed that has no capacity for greater growth.

Another Quaker trend has flourished chiefly on this side of the Atlantic since 1952. Its basic tenet is that Quakerism is composed of four elements: mysticism, evangelicism, rationalism, and humanitarianism. It is certainly a fact that these four elements can be found in contemporary Quaker life. It has been further stated that these four strands have been present in Quakerism from the beginning and that they constitute a "natural variety" that ought not to be "artificially restrained." If Quakerism is by definition a complex of four elements and has been so from the beginning then the task of Quaker leadership is to keep them in balance in accordance with what has been called "a wise historical pluralism." Thus the modern image of a Quaker leader is one who is not committed to any one of these four strands in a way that excludes the other three. If we accept the dogma that normative Quakerism must contain these four elements in balanced proportion then the Quaker of good character is a fellow who would never do anything to destroy or upset this balance. It would seem to follow that as long as this balance is maintained there is bound to be a co-development of all four elements in perpetual harmony. But in actual fact the effect of this teaching is to create an atmosphere in which there is such fear of upsetting the balance that a free discussion of differences is difficult. When free discussion languishes the inevitable consequence is a spiritual and intellectual vacuum that is soon filled from sources outside the Society. We are no longer a community set apart from the world, and the impact of non-Quaker ideas and movements often determines the direction in which Friends are moving. We are becoming an outer-directed rather than an inner-directed community. This is a time when we need Fox's counsel, "do not sell (truth) for changeable things that subsist for a time."

Perhaps the appeal of this four-strand theory is that it appears to account for the variety in present-day Quakerism, at least as far as these four strands are concerned. History as a means of explaining and justifying the status quo is not unknown among us. And we are paying the price for doing this,

namely that what history *really* has to tell us remains concealed. When we look at the past we see only that image of ourselves that we have projected there. Our present smallness and dividedness are not challenged by our study of history, but, on the contrary, these aspects of contemporary Quaker life are made to appear historically inevitable and respectable.

THE VIEW OF HISTORY THAT BELONGS TO QUAKERISM

I believe that it is essential to the life of Quakerism that it keep a right relation to its own history. The experience of hearing and obeying, although it must always be an experience of hearing God's voice "while it is today," is nonetheless an experience of a voice which has been speaking in every age. It is a voice that is not just for me but is for me in relation to God's purpose throughout history as he has revealed that purpose to those who were ready to hear and obey. Therefore, in the experience of hearing and obeying this voice we have fellowship with the obedient ones throughout the ages. Fox says, "As you love the light and bring your deeds to it, you will come to know the light Moses was in, and come to know the prophet that he said God would raise up, whom you should hear; and come to know the covenant of light that brings in the Gentiles . . . . "[6]

The answer to the question "Who are we?" is not entirely supplied by a knowledge of holy history, but neither is it answered without some knowledge of holy history. Holy history is predicated on a dynamic concept—the hearing and obeying of the voice of God *today*—and its story is the story of those who have heard and obeyed. It offers no comfort to those who seek to escape the present by "living in the past" and it discloses its secret only to those who hear and obey God's voice today. The voice that is heard "while it is today" is the voice that tells us what *our* place is in the ongoing story of holy history. *It is in this exercise of hearing and obeying that a man learns who he is.* When we are fulfilling the part to which God has called us in holy history then we know ourselves as God knows us and as he intends us to know ourselves. When Fox says "I am in my holy element, and holy work in the Lord"[7] he is bearing witness to how he found himself by hearing and obeying. "Man's knowledge of

his own nature is obtained from the act of decision as well as from his contemplation of God's works in relation to him."[8] It is a significant fact that the early Friends were men and women who *knew who they were* and in this knowledge they knew how they were related to Moses, the prophets, and apostles. They were consequently concerned that their story be preserved that "all might know the dealings of the Lord with them."

As man finds himself by hearing and obeying the voice of God so also must the church find itself by the same kind of exercise. The early Quaker community knew where it belonged in holy history and it knew this only because it was in the life of hearing and obeying that Moses, the prophets, and apostles were in.

There are two wrong ways to relate Quakerism to its history. One of these is to take some point in Quaker history and make it the norm for all Quakers at all times. Another is to read back into Quaker history the image of contemporary Quakerism.

It is my conviction that the relation of Quakerism to its own history can only be found in the context of a Christian understanding of the right relationship between God, man, and history. Christianity is not indifferent to history and it does not leave the question of historical relationships to be dealt with in some manner not provided for in the Christian revelation. The God of the Christian is concerned about history. He is concerned about the story of man and how that story is going to come out. "In the Bible," says G. E. Wright, "God is known and addressed primarily in the terms that relate him to society and to history."[9] The Bible has one master theme—the call of God for a people obedient to his word through whom he purposes to gather mankind into a community under his rule.

If the Bible is the book of the acts of God then these acts tell a story that is not ordinary history but a special kind of history. This special kind of history is what we mean by *holy history*. Otto Piper states that "The Bible describes holy history as a process in which people are prepared to follow God's bidding while in secular history 'the nations walk in their own counsels.' "[10] This means that Christianity is an eschatological religion and eschatology, says C. H. Dodd, "is an attempt to give

a satisfying account of the ways of God in terms of the time process, assumed to be real and the proper field of divine action." Christianity looks "back to a real beginning and forward to a real end" and conceives "the process from beginning to end as directed by the purpose of God." And finally, "in the coming of Christ we have the conclusive entrance of God into history . . . in which the whole purpose of God is fulfilled."[11]

Early Quakerism understood itself within the context of a Christian understanding of history and this means that it understood itself in terms of holy history and eschatology. It is significant that in putting Quakerism in its historical context William Penn began with Adam and Eve and brought the story through the fathers and Moses and the prophets to God's conclusive revelation through Jesus Christ which fulfilled the rest. Although for Penn and the early Friends God acted conclusively in Jesus Christ this did not mean, for them, that holy history had come to an end. The story of holy history is still being written in the only way that it ever was or could be written—in the lives of men and communities who are committed to hearing and obeying. Prophetic religion can never be reduced to a static system. God acts in history and directs it toward his own ends.

The early Quakers were interested in holy history since Pentecost. They began their study of Christian history with two questions: first, *What did God do for men through Jesus Christ?* and second, *To what extent does the history of Christianity reflect the purpose of God in sending Christ into the world?* The answer of early Friends to the first question focused on two things: first, the possibility of a holy life without legalism; and second, the possibility of a community living under God's rule without institutionalism. Both of these gifts are made possible under the gospel by the continued active presence of Christ as he reveals God's righteousness to his church and gives it a unique order based on his personal rule and the gifts he gives its members.

The question that early Friends put to their contemporaries was this: "Where is the church that is so ordered and which bears a faithful witness, through suffering, to God's righteousness?" This is what Fox was saying in his often repeated chal-

lenge "Are you in the same life and power that the prophets and apostles were in?" It is basic to early Quaker thinking to assume that in the purpose of God, the ongoing corporate existence of the visible church in history is not to be secured by a self-perpetuating religious organization. The true successors of the apostles are those related to Christ in a disciple relationship.

To the churchly establishment of his day Fox said:

> You have had the name of Christians, which name hath come by tradition, and succession . . . but the life and the power, and the love and the wisdom, that was among the apostles and in them . . . have you been . . . out of generally and it is in the life and power of God, in which God is served.[12]

> . . . to succeed them in the form without the power and Holy Ghost is no succession . . .[13]

> . . . to succeed the Apostles in the same Holy Ghost and power, and life that they were in, that is the right succession.[14]

The church of the true succession is recognized by its charismatic ordering and by its conformity to and suffering for a standard of righteousness divinely revealed. Fox maintains that the true successors of the apostles must have the "same righteousness" that the apostles had and that they must be in the same cross of Christ, for the Cross is "the power of God that crucifies them from the world."

The early Quaker doctrine of the long dark night of apostasy is to be understood in terms of this conception of succession. The apostasy that early Friends were talking about was as apostasy of *the church* and their criticism of the church "since the apostles' days" was that it had found another basis for its claim to succession than the basis furnished in the new covenant. The claim that there was a "long dark night of apostasy" "since the apostles' days" does not assert that there were no true Christians or no true church during this period. It claims rather that the true Christians and true church during this period were in tension with the great historical continuum that falsely claimed to be the true successor of the church of the apostles.

With this view of the meaning of succession the Quakers were bound to differ radically from both Roman Catholic and Protestant interpretations of church history. This difference is notably evident in Fox's view of what constitutes separation, schism, and secthood. To those who claimed the Quakers were a sect Fox replied, "The Quakers are not a sect, but are . . . come to live in the life as the prophets and apostles did . . ."[15] This statement which sometimes seems extravagant to modern Quaker ears is consistent with all that Fox ever said or did. He defines a schism as a "rent from Christ and his body, his spirit and power"[16] and he declares that "all are in a separation . . . if they are not . . . in the spirit of Christ the apostles and the true church were in . . . ."[17]

Early Friends were willing to have the term "children of the light" applied to themselves but we do not hear them talking of "grandchildren of the light!" They would have agreed with the London Yearly Meeting Epistle of 1857 which said, "Let it not be forgotten that vital Christianity cannot be transmitted as an inheritance to posterity." Now, if the ongoing life of corporate Christianity is to be understood in terms of maintaining a hearing-obeying relationship to Christ and not by any theory of natural succession "like unto earthly kings' crowns" then the question of paramount importance for us is surely the question—"Are *we* in this hearing-obeying relationship?"

I will now endeavor to explore some of the implications of this for us today and how our own history plays a part in answering this question.

THE CHURCH AND THE WORLD TODAY IN RELATION TO HOLY HISTORY

The question of the relation of Quakerism to its own history is ultimately a moral and spiritual one. There is a technical element involved—the task of accumulating and correlating data—but this technical element is not the decisive element. The problem of the relation of Quakerism to its own history is not essentially different from the problem of the relation of Quakerism to the church of the New Testament. It is not only a question of factual knowledge about the early church and early Quakerism. Something more is involved. Holy history is

relevant only to those who are themselves involved in holy history. Living "the life that the prophets and apostles were in" is Fox's way of describing the life of involvement in holy history.

In the Quaker conception of holy history there is a *twofold* orientation: to the current historical situation which perpetually changes, and to the God of history in whom there is no variableness or shadow of turning. The God of history who reveals his will through his mighty acts in history has conclusively revealed himself in Jesus Christ. This revelation is not limited to the events in the life-span of Jesus of Nazareth but it is a revelation that continues as men and women become disciples of the risen Christ and learn from him God's way of righteousness and holiness *for their generation.*

What the apostolic church and the early Quakers testified of their experiences of the living Christ is of the utmost relevance to all generations of Christians. But since they were called to bear their witness in holy history in an historical situation different from our own we cannot simply repeat the pattern of primitive Christianity and primitive Quakerism. The true church in any generation are the people who are living in the life of discipleship as it is related to the current historical situation. If the Quakers of today are living in the "life" they are as truly related to the first generation of Quakers as they can be. This is the right way for God's people in one generation to be related to God's people in another generation. There is no question of primitivism here and no question of natural succession. The forces of holy history are personal, moral, and spiritual forces.

All those who are living "in the life" *now* know that they are an integral part of an ongoing story of which the previous chapters were written by previous generations who were "in the life." They know that they are members of a community the foundations of which are the prophets and apostles, Jesus Christ being the chief corner stone.

The absolute necessity that is laid on God's people to bear their witness in relation to the current historical situation has nothing to do with what might be called "keeping up with religious trends." The call of God for a holy righteous people

may have to be answered in a way that creates conflict with popular religious trends. The makers of holy history are seldom found among those who float with the current. The early Quakers, for instance, were described by Penn as people who were struggling against wind and tide. If then to be true successors of the early Christians and early Quakers we must live in the same life and power that they were in, what does this involve for us today and how should we understand the historical situation in which our witness must be made?

Today in America we live in a religiously colored society and our society receives its religious coloration mainly from the Christian denominations within it. But to belong to a Christian denomination in a religiously colored society is not necessarily to belong to a Christian community. G. E. Wright describes the congregational life of the denominations as gatherings "of individuals, motivated by a desire to be decent citizens in possession of peace of mind but knowing little of Christian community in the Biblical sense and expecting little from it."[18] What then do we mean by Christian community? By Christian community I mean a community whose spiritual center is the determining force in the lives of its members and in its own life as a community.

The denomination as we know it in America today has a spiritual center but its life and the lives of its members are only partially determined by that center. The American denomination has become a captive to the civilization and culture that surround it. The denominations are pledged to serve one God—the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—who is the father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. But they are largely composed of people who also serve two false gods and this constitutes their captivity.

We find the first of these false gods in the mechanism of mass production and the absolute demands that it makes on men and society. The second is the modern nation-state that seems always to be moving in the direction of a totalitarianism that swallows up all the elements of independent existence—political, economic, cultural, and religious.

The striving for power and gain is part of the life of the member of the denomination. He is constantly pulled in three different directions by the demands of his religious, economic, and political commitments. He takes it for granted that religion is one element of a cultural complex and that its function is to supply the energies with which to cope with the economic and political world as it is. Thus Christianity tends to be regarded as a wholesome element in secular civilization and where this viewpoint prevails the basic conflict between Christ's way of the cross and modern civilization remains hidden. There is a wide range of religious activity open to the member of the denomination, but the course of his life is not determined by a spiritual center and the life of the denomination is also not determined by a spiritual center.

In seeking to integrate religious society with worldly society modern man has made a fatal mistake because "the problem of life is not that of integration with the world . . . it is the problem of obedience to the will of the transcendent God."[19] Without a transcendent urge which outweighs all the clamor for power and money," said the historian, Burckhardt, "nothing will be of any use."[20]

I am not going to say much here about the false God of political totalitarianism. It is a threat that has not yet fallen on us in the way that it has fallen on others in our generation. And yet we would do well to ask ourselves whether church life as we know it in America possesses the inner resources to withstand the pressures of a totalitarian government. I agree with Burckhardt when he states that persecuting governments "might meet resistance of the strongest sort from Christian minorities who would not fear even martyrdom."[21] There is a power which is greater than any earthly power, and that is the power of the cross. But I want to speak more particularly here about the worship of material things, because materialism is part of the air we all breathe. We cannot say that materialism is a threat that has not fallen on us. This is the false god that Jesus said we could not serve and serve the true God at the same time. Fox said, "In all things the Lord is to have the heart. Therefore let

it not go down in a multitude of encumbrances and be smothered in the earth."[22]

It may seem extravagant to say that the typical church member of today is to be described as "striving for power and gain." Certainly there are few who would be willing to accept this description. But suppose we change the words around a little and call it achieving financial independence? or improving our standard of living? or providing for ourselves and our children? These phrases sound innocent enough and yet it is in this guise that Mammonism gains an entrance into the Christian's heart.

Today we are more naive than early Friends for they saw that materialism makes its appearance in two forms which they called the *lawful* self and the *unlawful* self. The London Yearly Meeting Epistle of 1802 describes the lawful self as "the too eager and therefore unlawful pursuit of lawful things." "There is a lawful self and an unlawful self," says William Penn, "and both are to be denied for the sake of him, that in submission to the will of God counted nothing too dear, that he might save us. . . . The lawful self, that which we are to deny, is that conveniency, ease, enjoyment and plenty, which in themselves are as far from being evil, that they are the bounty and blessings of God to us: As husband, wife, child, house, land, reputation, liberty and life itself. These are God's favors that we may enjoy with lawful pleasure and justly improve as our honest interest. But when God requires them . . . they must not be preferred but must be denied."[23]

Before the end of the seventeenth century Quaker leaders were aware of the price that was being paid for a too easy acceptance of the lawful self, and William Edmundson writes that "eagerness after the lawful things of this world at this time, hinders many Friends' growth in the precious truth and their service to it in their day, tho' otherwise of great parts and abilities to do much service for truth . . . but we cannot serve God as we ought to do and as the day requires, neither please the captain of our spiritual welfare as good soldiers if we involve and load ourselves with the things of this world . . . and too many of our Society . . . who have in measure escaped the unclean, unjust and unlawful

things . . . now sit down in the dust with the lawful things of this world."[24]

This question became a major concern of the Leinster Province Meeting in Ireland in 1698 which gave forth an epistle that states that as the Lord had made them aware of the spiritual loss resulting from a "too eager pursuit after the lawful things of this world, a concern came upon us, that if possible we might all come to be limited with the bounds of truth . . . and to depend more upon that providential hand of the Lord, that will afford us what we stand in need of . . . .

" . . . and there was an unanimous consent, one by one, to offer up ourselves to the judgment of the . . . Meeting, or other approved Elders . . . , if in anything we do exceed those bounds . . . . And in subjection one to another in our possessions, holdings, callings, trading and dealing amongst men, not to be our own judges, or walk in the light of our own eyes, considering the wise man's saying 'that every man's cause is good in his own eyes' but his neighbor finds him out and in the multitude of counsel is safety. Not that we intend to deprive any of the moderate and lawful use of things of this world . . . or to invade and take away property but to bring all things into right bounds . . . that so none may be guilty of the great sin of abusing the Lord's mercies, but might use and enjoy them to his honor. . . . Thus shall we give evident testimony to the world by our moderation, even in the lawful things, that we are true followers of the Lord Jesus Christ in a self-denying life."[25]

If the church needed a corporate economic witness based on corporate stewardship in 1698 it certainly needs it now. Even as our peace testimony gives evidence that we are true followers of the Lord Jesus Christ so also ought we, in this Mammonistic age, to give evidence by our use of this world's goods that we are Jesus' disciples and true successors of the early Friends.

CONCLUSION

In the foregoing I have tried to answer the question: "What is the right reason for relating Quakerism to its own history?" and I have endeavored to point out some of the implications

of rightly relating the Quakerism of today to its own history. If we have forgotten who we are in holy history or perhaps, even, that there is such a thing as holy history, then the word of the living God will communicate little to us. Thus far the redemptive word of God has come to us in the language of holy history and eschatology. If we do not know what God has already done in history his word to us will be robbed of much of its meaning. If we are mistaken about the situation in contemporary society and history then we are likely to fail to make a witness that is relevant to our generation.

We cannot recover the spiritual center that belongs to Quakerism unless we are rightly related to our own history. When we know who we are and what our place is in God's purpose for history we can begin to enter into that life, the life of hearing and obeying, that the prophets and apostles were in.

There are forces in Quakerism today that are constantly pulling it from its own true center. When honest-hearted seekers or our own youth turn toward the center for direction they find instead of a center – scatteredness. We need to recapture the conviction that the cause for which the Society has been called into existence is a great cause. The Quaker vision is an exalted vision. It is not a "little store of faith" or a twopenny contribution. We do not stand on the periphery of historical Christianity with our fragment of Christian truth waiting for the day when we will be absorbed back into the "main current." The faith to which we are called to bear witness is a faith that pushes *beyond* the so-called great traditions of western Christianity.

When a church fellowship appears in our time that is ordered by the order of the gospel and by charismatic leadership and which answers God's call to witness against the course of the world as we find it in the life of today, and which stands and suffers and does not scatter in time of persecution—then *this* community will be the spiritual successor of the prophets and apostles and early Friends. It is only such a community that will be ready to answer the question, "Are you in the same life and power that the prophets and apostles were in?"

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Lewis Benson is no stranger to this publication since he is a member of its Editorial Board and contributor of a principal article in the Spring 1960 issue. A year ago he and his family joined with two other families in forming the "Baring Street Fellowship," an intentional community in West Philadelphia, as answer to "Christ's call for a visible body of disciples sharing in a common life, vision and testimony." A printer by trade, his true vocation is that of studying early Quakerism and keeping the Society of Friends informed of his discoveries. In the performance of this work he makes a very valuable contribution to Quakerism. He attends the Powelton Friends Meeting. In 1954-55 he was a fellow at Woodbrooke and was later a lecturer at both Woodbrooke and Pendle Hill. He is widely known for his pamphlet *Prophetic Quakerism,* and a variety of articles.

Wilmer A. Cooper, chairman of the Quaker Theological Discussion Group and Administrative Secretary of the newly-formed Earlham School of Religion, is a member of the First Friends Meeting, Richmond. He received his first degree from Wilmington College and graduate degrees from Haverford College, Yale Divinity School, and Vanderbilt University. For the seven years preceding his joining the administration of Earlham College he was administrative secretary of the Friends Committee on National Legislation. He has traveled very widely in Friends' work in the United States and is thoroughly acquainted with the variety of American Friends meetings. He and Emily Haines Cooper are the parents of four children.

Chris Downing is welcomed with special enthusiasm to these pages as the first woman to write a major article in *Quaker Religious Thought.* Although most of the details of her life, she states, "are more appropriate for a woman's page feature than for *Quaker Religious Thought*" (since she is the mother of five children of whom the eldest is 8) she has yet found time and energy to graduate with English honors from Swarthmore College, to work for more than a year with the Jungian psychoanalyst Ira Progoff as research associate, and two years ago to enroll as a graduate student at Drew University. She has now completed all her work in this program except the doctoral thesis, which deals with a phase of the thought of Martin Buber. German by birth, she came to this country as a child. She is a member of the Summit, N. J., Friends Meeting, has written articles for Friends papers and has participated actively in Friends conferences.

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